

Articles from our April 2017 Magazine.

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READER'S LETTER

Lime Tree Way

Dear Friends,

I wish you a very happy and joy-filled Easter.

I think that Easter is probably the most important of the Christian festivals. I hope that it never gains the popularity of Christmas, along with all the commercial activity and extravagance that undermines the Christian message of Christmas. However, Easter is certainly a time to be celebrated by people who believe in Jesus.

It is sometimes claimed that Easter has taken over a pagan celebration. Such claims are wrong, for the date is determined by historical events in the Bible. The Jewish celebration of Passover commemorates the freeing of the Israeli people from slavery in Egypt some 3,300 years ago. The people had been slaves for 400 years and God had sent plagues on the Egyptians to force them to free his people – you can find the full account in the book of Exodus in the Bible. The timing of Passover is given in the book of Exodus. What, you may wonder, is the connection to Easter?

Jesus had been teaching and healing people for about three years when he entered Jerusalem for events that turned out to be life changing. It was Passover and he joined with his disciples for the Passover meal as described in the book of Exodus. The religious leaders were strongly opposed to Jesus and wanted to be rid of him and the threat he seemed to pose, so they came to an agreement with Judas, one of his followers, that he would lead them to Jesus. Then, on trumped up charges, Jesus was killed by crucifixion on a wooden cross. The religious leaders thought that was the end of him, but they were wrong.

Three days later, on the first day of the week, some women found the stone that covered the entrance to Jesus' tomb removed and then they met with Jesus, who had been dead but now was alive. In the next few days and weeks Jesus met with his followers who were changed by the experience. They had been timid but now were able to continue the work that Jesus had been doing. It is Jesus rising from the dead that we celebrate at Easter.

Easter is on a Sunday, the first day of the week, and is usually close to Passover. It is a Christian celebration following on from events in scripture.

Ever since they left Egypt until the time of Jesus the people of Israel offered animal sacrifices to God. One important sacrifice was for forgiveness when they had done something wrong. Jesus, the Son of God, was sacrificed for the wrongdoings of people who believe in him. He takes on himself the weight of the wrong his followers have done and continue to do, and through his rising from the dead he has opened for all of us the possibility of life eternal.

Thomas, who would not believe that other followers of Jesus had seen him alive until he had put his fingers into Jesus' wounds, was once told by Jesus 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' Please give that statement some thought. In overcoming death Jesus opened the door for all of us to have life after our bodies die. We need faith in Jesus, for he told us so, but dying is not the end for people of faith.

Like Thomas we may all have doubts at some time, but if we have faith in Jesus, accepting him as our risen Lord, then we can look forward to a bright future once we leave this world. Please give Jesus some

thought this Easter time, and do have a happy Easter, secure in the knowledge that the risen Jesus cares about you.

Allan Hobson

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

As I stood at the Church Gate, with the early spring sun shining through a dull white-blue haze, I wondered at the beauty of the Churchyard, with its grass and green moss almost hidden by the white flowers amongst the gravestones. And then I asked myself, what had a celebrated poet done to deserve a day of prayer, annually, in the April Church Calendar? So, upon returning home, I set about some quick researching.

I discovered that an Italian politician, and poet, Gabriele, was her father; he first had two sons (1828 & 1829) and then, on 5 December 1830, Georgina Christina, was born in Charlotte Street (now Hallam Street) London. Her parents wanted her to have a governess and to be educated at home. Very early on she became precociously interested in writing poetry and shortly before she became a teenager her grandfather actually printed a pamphlet, which she had composed. Both her brothers were also poets. Their home was filled with Italian books of poetry and other forms of literature, which influenced her works in later life.

When she was 14, she had a breakdown which, sadly, resulted in her having periods of depression throughout her life. Along with her mother, she began to take a very keen interest in religious affairs. At the age of 17 she fell in love with a Roman Catholic painter, James Collinson, who was a co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (founded 2 years earlier), but their engagement was broken off during 1850, because she was a very devout High Church Anglican and he was not. There were two other gentlemen who wanted to marry her, Charles Cayley, a linguist, and the painter John Brett, both of whom she refused.

In 1850, when the Gem published its first issue, two of her articles were included in it. She modelled for some of her brother Dante's paintings, especially that of the Girlhood of the Virgin Mary. Most of her poetry is religious; among these is the Christmas Carol "In the Bleak Midwinter". She also focused upon poems for children. From 1847, Christina experimented with the verse forms of sonnets, hymns, ballads; drawing from Holy Bible narratives, folk tales and the lives of some of the Saints, along with meditations on death and loss, by putting them mainly in the Romantic tradition. She was hailed as the natural successor to Elizabeth Barratt Browning. It is of note that from 1859 to 1870, she was a volunteer worker in Highgate, London, at the House of Charity attached to St Mary Magdalene, which acted as a refuge for fallen women (former prostitutes).

The last 20 years of her life were dogged by illness and she departed into the spiritual life on 29 December, 1894, aged sixty four. There is a stone tablet marking the place where it is believed that she died in Torrington Square, and she was buried in Highgate Cemetery. She is remembered on April 27th annually.

Colin Trollope

SHYIRA, RWANDA - ITS HOSPITAL AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Shyira is a remote community in the hills of North-West Rwanda. In the 1830s missionaries went to several places in Rwanda, including Shyira. It was from these mission stations that the East-African Revival started.

The missionaries were not simply interested in spreading the Gospel. In Shyira two medical doctors, Norman and Catherine James, were responsible for the work. As with the other mission stations they took responsibility for the diverse needs of the people, building both schools and a hospital. The plans for the hospital in Shyira were drawn on a single sheet of foolscap paper in 1937, and the hospital was opened by the king of Rwanda, Mutara III Rudahigwa, in 1938. Through most of the remaining years of the 20th century the hospital at Shyira was well thought of, with people travelling quite long distances, even from neighbouring countries, to be treated there.

In 1994 disaster struck. Rwanda was engulfed in a genocide that resulted in the death of more than one million people. The killing lasted about 100 days after which many of the militia were driven into nearby Congo. The problem for Shyira was that they needed recruits and drugs - both, they thought, available in Shyira's schools and hospital. Shyira remained a dangerous place until early 2000.

In 2000 the hospital buildings were badly damaged and medical staff had been driven away. One newly qualified nurse had been appointed and was at the hospital when a member of St. Luke's went there in September 2000. Back in Formby he told about what he had seen and the following year ten members of St. Luke's visited Shyira. They created a link between Shyira parish and St. Luke's and promised to repair the maternity building.

It soon became clear that the building could not be repaired, and the people of St. Luke's and their friends undertook to provide funding for a new hospital. The new building was opened by the Minister of Health in April 2004, and Formby Rotary Club provided funding to equip it. However, the maternity hospital was still without qualified staff. St Luke's created a charity, the Shyira Trust, and the training of two nurses as midwives was paid for by the Trust. Since the first of the midwives qualified in 2009 there has been just one maternal death at Shyira, many fewer than predicted by national statistics.

It is not surprising that a maternity hospital that was very successful in saving lives quickly became overcrowded. The situation was made worse because many women would arrive up to a week before their baby was due because the difficult terrain made getting to the hospital something of a challenge. We were asked if we could help with building an extension. However, with fund raising already underway the Government of Rwanda stated that the 80 year old main hospital building must be replaced.



The church and diocese must pay about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the cost of the new building, shown in the picture, if they are to retain control. To do that they have taken out a loan. We, through the Shyira Trust, are helping with their costs. There was also a need to prove the Christian foundation of the hospital, and shortly before meeting with government officials a friend of a descendant of Norman and Catherine James arrived in Shyira with photographs of the 1938 opening. Our God is in control of events.

Through supporting the hospital, and through it the people, we have developed many friends in Shyira. That has led us to other projects including sponsoring children in school, building a children's centre, support for child-headed families, restoration of a primary school and much more. However, friendship and understanding are at the heart of everything we do. Two people from Rwanda will be with us from 9th to 24th May – see Dates and Notes on Page 3.

Allan Hobson

GOING TO DO NOTHING FOR EVER AND EVER?

What is your idea of heaven? That is of course if you have one! The one that sticks out in my mind is that of the slave woman on one of the sugar plantations in the new world. When dying and asked about heaven her reply was, 'Don't think of me now, don't think of me ever. I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever.' Her idea was coloured by years of toil as a slave. Thus one thing that has occurred to me is that people's ideas of heaven often depend on their experience on earth. An Arab, for instance, may think of it as a wonderful oasis, with its date palms and well. An Inuit may perhaps think of it as an igloo with warmth and shelter from the ice and snow. It may be for some a place where wrongs are righted or the bereaved may think of it as a place where they will be re-united with loved ones. The theme running through all of these is that heaven is a place.

Then again the church has gone the same way. 'Jerusalem the Golden', we sing, looking forward to passing over the waters of death and entering the Celestial City, with bells ringing and its King enthroned in Glory. 'There's a friend for little children above the bright blue sky,' the Victorians sang. Better for me would be not a place but a state of being - remote from the physical world. If you like hymns, my favourite is, 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence and with fear and trembling stand.' As I muse on this wonderful description of heaven, I think of fleecy white clouds, celestial choirs and angels twanging on harps of gold. Bach when the boss is around, Mozart when he's not!

However the mindset of the first century AD was that the usual picture of the afterlife was a number of different places to which people would be allotted after death depending on the virtues or vices they had shown in this life. This thinking invaded the early church and led eventually to the concept of purgatory which in the medieval church got a bit sticky.

So, dear readers, take your pick - but in the end I would rather look at what Jesus himself said about his father's kingdom. He's on your side in describing it as a place for he speaks of it as a dwelling place or a home. Mansions, as in the Authorised Version, is a bad translation of the Greek 'monai,' (plural) especially as Jesus never lived in a mansion. We have to look at the kind of house that Jesus himself lived in to get some idea of what he meant. If you go to Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, the small town where he based his early ministry, you can see amid the ruins of the old town the remains of the 'Peter House.' This small building has been hallowed since the days of the Galilean Church in the first century as the home of Peter and the place where Jesus cured Peter's mother in law of possibly, it is thought, Lake Malarial Fever. Continually occupied over the centuries, first as a house and then a house church, the archaeologists are not only able to show us 1st century fish hooks but crosses and graffiti on its walls. Some of these mention Jesus as Lord and Christ. The house developed from normal family use in the time of Jesus to a house church very early on.

The New Testament was written in Koine or Common Greek, at that time the language of the Middle East. So in Jesus' day a 'mone' (single) was the kind of one storey house set amid narrow alleyways in a small village or town. It was the dwelling place pictured in the story of the friend at midnight, where a family had one room which they often shared with their animals. In it your room was connected with many other family houses by narrow alley ways which made up the larger community. That is what you will see now, of the town of Jesus' day, on the lake shore at Capernaum. Privacy was minimal but it must have afforded safety and a community spirit not found in modern living. This is the kind of dwelling place or house that Jesus had in mind when he talks about his father's kingdom. The many dwelling places are connected with each other. They are not the 'many mansions,' such as Herod's Herodion with its fantastic palace on top of a conical hill or the many other palaces of that megalomaniac in Jericho, Caesarea and Masada.

Imagine then a safe communal dwelling with room to stretch out and places for silence and reflection with family and loved ones there or not too far away. A place where a simple meal with loved ones will do just fine and if there is a glass of wine as well, so much the better. Heaven is important to me, not because my life here is miserable and I am looking for, 'Pie in the sky when you die'. Rather it is because I need to know that the good things in life are there as well - such as loved ones, truth, beauty and peace. 'In my father's house are many rooms.' That is the real meaning of Jesus as he talks about heaven as family and community. 'I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever' is not on the agenda as I've a feeling that there will also be plenty to do. He is there as well at his Father's side. Want to go there? Well, if so, as I have said so often, the entrance is through the door of your parish church!

Revd Roy Baker

FACTS FOR CHURCH FORWARD PLANNING



Providing Facts for Forward Planning

to my knowledge is unrivalled.

Each Bulletin comprises **major articles**, shorter pieces shown as **Snowflakes**, even smaller pieces shown as **Snippets**, humorous information and lists of books which we may find helpful, and the inevitable cartoon!

I have been given approval by Peter Brierley to select and show extracts from his bi-monthly bulletin in our parish magazine which I judge interesting and relevant for us and from which we will learn something new.

His bulletin has the title FUTUREFIRST and it has subscribers from the UK, Europe and America. It is very highly regarded and

SNIPPETS

The 2016 annual British Social Attitudes survey found that the percentage of people who said they had no religion fell for the 2nd year running – from 49% in 2015 to 48%.

Between 4% and 9% of the UK population have had a near-death experience, as estimated by the Revd Roger Harper, an Anglican prison chaplain and psychologist.

46,200 students at British universities attended Christian Union Mission weeks in 2016, with 860 seekers at follow-up courses. 30,000 students attended CU Carol services in December 2015.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT AMERICAN MEGACHURCHES?

A recent issue of the Catholic Herald included this article in which the author pondered how our UK Catholic parishes – AND OTHER CHURCHES – could learn from American Evangelical Megachurches.

What is a megachurch? Numbers are obviously a determining factor. Two thousand or more weekly attendees (not necessarily all at the same service) is the generally accepted criterion. But size in itself prompts a more interesting question. What are these congregations doing that results in such robust figures? (Not just robust but also growing: 83% of American megachurches reported an increase in attendance between 2009 and 2014.)

In fact size really isn't everything. The real engine of success lies in smallness. Among the defining features of American megachurches is a multitude of diverse social and outreach ministries – an intentional small group system. In between each Sunday's thousands-strong worship extravaganza there is a web of ancillary activities and meet-ups. For example at Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston, central to church activity are its Adult Life Groups – small groups where friends meet, share in discussions about the bible, and lift up one another's needs in prayer.

At its main campus (there are 2 others) you can sign up for one of 70 such groups which meet on different days and target different age-groups, states of life (couples, singles, widowed) and language preferences.

Four fifths of megachurches say that such small groups are central to their overall strategy and they are actively seeking to grow and diversify what they offer.

ANGLICAN MIDWEEK MINISTRY

Numbers attending church midweek in the Church of England are increasing, and maybe in other denominations as well where they are not normally measured.

In 2013 the decision was taken to ask Anglican churches to identify separately those attending church for school services such as carol services or other special services, and these have now been measured for 3 years, 2013 to 2015.

These are services held in a church – not events in schools where a member of a ministry team goes into a school to hold or lead a service or speak at one. The children have to come out of school to attend these midweek services.

About a fifth of those attending these midweek "school services" are adults – these are also counted and as with the children, show an increase in numbers.

John Nelson



SCHOOL AND CHURCH



Did you know that our church is often filled with children? The children visit the church to learn about our different services, to learn about our history and, most often, for their own services. The churchyard is also used as a base for Forest School, to learn about 'bugs' and for art lessons.

On Friday 31st March it is (or was – depending on when you are reading this!) the school Easter service and the Easter story will be acted out by year 4. It is always very moving to see it being retold by the children.

Over 430 children, plus teachers, teaching assistants, parents and friends come to hear the story and, as we cannot fit that many into our church, that means there will be two services during the course of the morning. It is wonderful to welcome them into 'their' church.

Jean Cox

ST LUKE'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO VISIT US?

Every day we welcome visitors: prospective parents with their children, clergy, outside agencies who provide professional support, local nurseries and even our local MP. Parents, parishioners and even the postman! After they have looked around school, met our children, talked with staff or maybe just had a quick word with the office ladies – the overwhelming message we hear is 'there is a lovely feeling here in this school'.

We refer to it as the St. Luke's family and everyone is part of it.

Over the past few years we have recognised the importance of sharing what we have at St Luke's with the wider community, from children visiting our older members of the parish to our latest project which is reaching out to the youngest.

The 'Roots and Shoots' baby and toddler group is our latest venture into sharing our Christian values and family learning philosophy. The youngest members of our community come along every Wednesday afternoon with parents, grandparents and carers to have fun and make friends. Families new to Formby have forged new friendships and old friends have been reunited. Our 'Roots and Shoots' family also join us for special occasions, most recently to watch our Reception children perform their version of 'Noah's Ark'.

We are also able to invite nurseries into school to share our resources and have been privileged to visit local settings to share in their learning experiences. With Church support, we have been able to facilitate a 'mini forest school' adventure for our friends at Pine Pixies Pre-school. We explored the woodland behind church – looking for signs of spring with magnifying glasses, shared 'The Stick Man' story and then collected sticks to make stick men of our own. These opportunities to meet and work with children from the nurseries have made the transition to 'big school' a much more reassuring process for them and their families.

Over the past year we have hosted 'Stay and Play' sessions, a pre-school sports day, music workshops and a party to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday.

Our next community venture will take place in the summer term. We are planning a new reading partnership between adults and some of our younger children. If you enjoy being around children and have time to spare – an hour or two in an afternoon – then please get in touch for more details on 01704 872692.

We promise you a warm welcome.

Sharon Cowey (Headteacher)

2017 FAITH EASTER EGG LAUNCHED

The new look Real Easter Egg 2017 range has been launched, and churches are being asked to encourage people to support this unique way of sharing the story of Easter.

This year a 24 page Easter story-activity book, illustrated by Alida Massari, is included in the Original, Egg Hunt and Dark eggs. The Special Edition has an Easter traditions booklet inside. The Sharing box, with 30 eggs, comes with 30 colour-in posters.

Out of the 80 million Easter eggs sold in this part of the world every year, The Real Easter Egg is the only one which has a copy of the Easter story in the box, is made of Fairtrade chocolate and makes a donation to charity from sales.

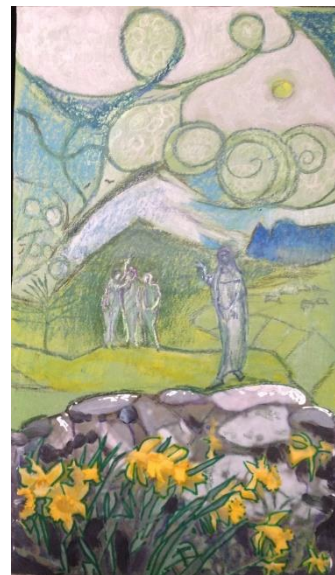
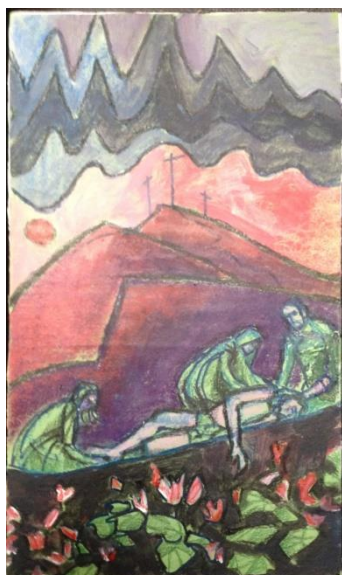
The Real Easter Egg was launched in 2010 but the supermarkets turned down the idea. It was left to churches and church schools to place orders to fund The Meaningful Chocolate Company so they could make The Real Easter Egg.

David Marshall, creator of the Real Easter Egg, said; "With the support of churches more than one million eggs have been sold with 750,000 of these sent through the post directly to churches and schools. The rest have been sold through independent retailers and supermarkets.

"The success of The Real Easter Egg has meant that the production of Fairtrade chocolate has moved to the UK. Over £250,000 has been raised from sales for charitable causes. Due to production restrictions, this year we have slightly fewer eggs available so we recommend people order as early as possible."

The whole range can be ordered online at www.realeasteregg.co.uk (with free delivery) or from Traidcraft, Eden.co.uk, TLM trading.com, Embrace the Middle East. Christian bookshops and some cathedrals also have stocks. **You can also buy the blue Original egg from Tesco, Waitrose and Morrisons.**

RENAISSANCE AND RESURRECTION



Reborn - 'The stone the builders rejected' had, in three days, risen from the dead and the world was changed forever.

In three centuries, Art was reborn and our western world was changed forever.

Triptych ikon.

In the left hand panel, just as Easter is the high point of the Church's celebration and liturgy, the Pietà is commemorated. Nearly every artist from the 'Trecento' to the 'Cinquecento' painted a 'Lamentation' or 'Pietà' as Christ's body was brought down from the cross and embraced by His mother before being entombed. This culminated in what is called the High Renaissance in Italy in the 16th century with such artists as Botticelli, Bellini, Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci. The colours of outrage and

mourning are used recalling Donatello's and Verrochio's treatment of the subject. I always think of the great Kathleen Ferrier singing Dido's Lament as appropriate though it had no actual connection with the art of the Renaissance.

In the centre panel, we consider Birth and Rebirth, the idea that Jesus couldn't be reborn without first dying and thus, the expiation for mankind by the Son of God – *Cristus Vincit*. Here comes the explosion into consciousness of the Resurrection. Here the colours of Hope; of rising again, the dawning realisation through light – white and gold. *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi* – Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world.'

I am reminded of the genius who exploded into the world of the Arts – Leonardo. In his painting of *The Virgin and St Ann* we see Jesus – the baby – reaching down to pat the lamb's head – the symbol of innocence and sacrifice. What strikes me is the expression on Ann's face – calm and sad – as Mary gently restrains the babe. Here are the symbols of what would happen to Him in his adult life.

The Right hand panel – Spring. Green, white and yellow, colours of new growth as our landscape is reborn each year – the power and force of nature re-awakening – the music of Vivaldi, the song of the lambs, the vividness of the sky in the light of April, the clarity of vision.

Vision; I was delving through some of my tutorial notes of the 1970s and found excerpts from Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting (on the Painter's Eye)* and his love of landscape, especially mountains which he regularly climbed in his 20 years in Milan.

'Now do you not see that the eye embraces the beauty of the whole world? It is the Lord of astronomy and the maker of cosmography; it counsels and corrects all the arts of mankind; it moves men to different parts of the world; it is the prince of mathematics, its sciences are certain; it has generated architecture, perspective, and the divine art of painting. Oh most excellent thing above all others created, what peoples, what tongues shall be those which can fully describe your true operation? This is the window of the human body, through which it mirrors its way and brings to fruition the beauty of the world, by which the soul is content to stay in its human prison.'

Spring, of course, is inspirational. The greatest depiction of spring is Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* where he marries the imagery of mythology to Christianity. The figure of Venus is the Madonna; the celebratory dance of the three Virtues has its parallel in theological symbolism. In the painting, it is said, Botticelli's attention to detail is embedded in over 40 varieties of flowers found in the surroundings of Florence and elsewhere in Tuscany. I use Sandro's term, *Mystical Nativity*, from another of his great paintings, for many of my ikons in the concept of birth and rebirth but here I have crudely shown the snowdrops of the end of winter replaced by the daffodils of spring, death followed by the resurrection of new life - the Rite of Spring as Stravinsky would have it.

How fortunate we are in our cycle of seasons when we think of the mother-and-child images we see in our news about Africa where spring has disappeared leaving the earth, which their men tilled and grazed, parched and barren and producing nothing but dust.

(As I write about the three panels, our family awaits the birth of 'lambs' each by my two daughters). What better time of the year for new life than Spring. How lucky we are.)

John Hart

ST LUKE'S



Tea Room Opens Friday 28th April

and

**each Friday, Saturday
& Bank Holiday Monday**

11:00am - 4:00pm

to the end of August

in

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Next to the Church in the Pinewoods with pedestrian access from St. Luke's Church Road and Lifeboat Rd.

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